

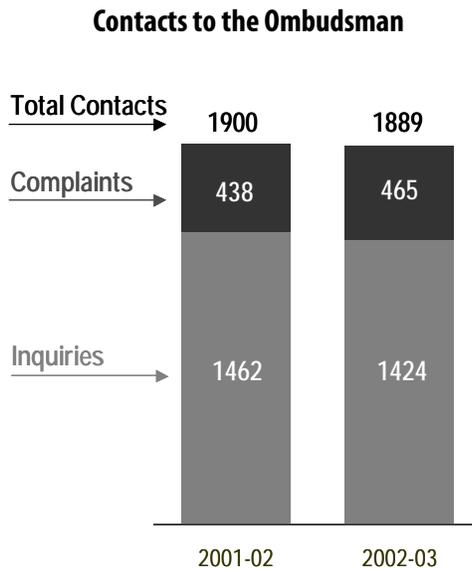
INQUIRY AND COMPLAINT PROFILES

The Ombudsman listens to families and citizens who **contact** the office with questions or concerns about services provided through the child protection and child welfare system. By listening carefully, the Ombudsman is able to respond effectively to their **inquiries** and **complaints**.

This section describes contacts made by families and citizens during the reporting period of September 1, 2002 to August 31, 2003.

Contacts to the Ombudsman

From September 1, 2002 to August 31, 2003, families and citizens contacted the Ombudsman 1,889 times. These contacts were primarily **inquiries** made by persons in search of information and assistance. Nearly one-third of these contacts were formal **complaints** seeking an Ombudsman investigation, a significant increase from 2001-02.



Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

Contacts. When families and citizens contact the Ombudsman, the contact is documented as either an inquiry or complaint.

Inquiries. Persons call or write to the Ombudsman wanting basic information on how the office can help them with a concern, or they have questions about the child protection and child welfare system.

The Ombudsman responds directly to these inquiries, some of which require additional research. The office refers other questions to the appropriate agency.

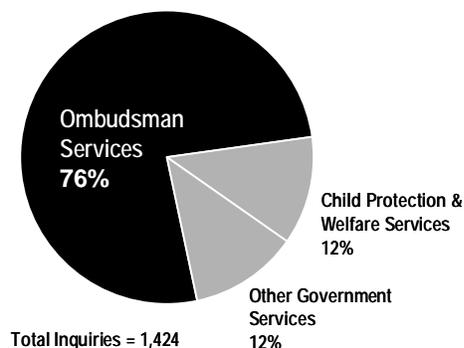
Complaints. Persons file a complaint with the Ombudsman when they have a specific complaint against the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) or other agency that they want the office to investigate.

The Ombudsman investigates every complaint that is within its jurisdiction.

Fielding Inquiries

The Ombudsman received 1424 inquiries from families and citizens who needed information at an average rate of **27 inquiries per week**.

Most inquiries seek information about the Ombudsman



Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

- ▶ 76% wanted **basic information** on how the Ombudsman could help, how to file a complaint, and how to get a complaint form. If their concern involved the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration, OFCO explained that they have the right to contact the Office of Constituent Relations.
- ▶ **About 12% concerned laws, policies,** and procedures for child protection and child welfare services. Ombudsman does not provide legal advice, explains legal rights and responsibilities.
- ▶ **About 12% concerned other government services.** The Ombudsman found out who to contact and referred these people to agencies that could help.

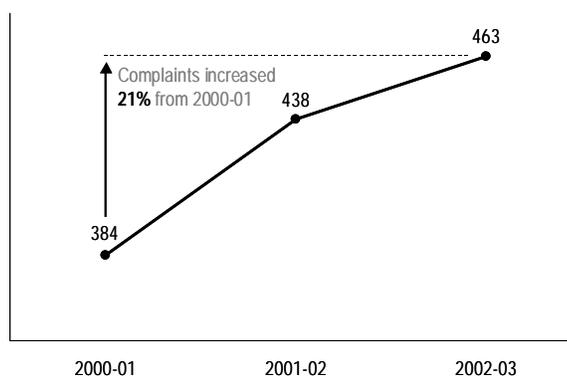
Receiving Complaints

A complaint to the Ombudsman must involve an act or omission by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) or other agency that affects:

- ▶ A child at risk of abuse, neglect or other harm by a parent or caretaker.
- ▶ A child or parent that has been the subject of a report of child abuse or neglect, or parental incapacity.

The Ombudsman received 463 complaints in 2003, an all-time high and an increase of 17 percent from 2000-01. The historic upward trend in the number of complaints filed with the Ombudsman shows no signs of slowing.

Annual Complaints to the Ombudsman



Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

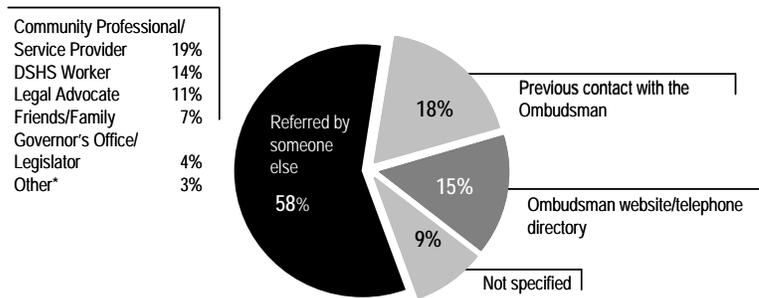
How they heard about the Ombudsman

The majority (58%) of individuals filing complaints with the Ombudsman indicated that they were referred to the office by someone else. Over half of these individuals reported that they were referred by a community professional/service provider (e.g., teacher, counselor, child care provider, doctor, private agency social worker, mental health professional) or DSHS worker.

Eighteen percent knew about the office from a previous contact, while 15 percent said they found the office via the Ombudsman website or telephone directory.

Persons Who Complained to the Ombudsman

From September 1, 2002 to August 31, 2003



As in previous years, parents, grandparents and other relatives of the child whose family is involved with DSHS filed the majority of the complaints with the Ombudsman.

*Assistant attorney general, law enforcement official, media and judge.

Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

Complaints Involving DSHS

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration is the state's largest provider of child protection and child welfare services. It is therefore not surprising that the Children's Administration was the subject of 93 percent of complaints to the Ombudsman.¹

Of these, 93 percent were directed at the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which includes Child Protective Services, Child Welfare and Adoption Services, and Family Reconciliation Services. A small percentage involved the Children's Administration headquarters and the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR), which licenses and investigates alleged child maltreatment in foster homes, group homes, and other residential facilities for children

¹ The remaining seven percent were directed against: Other DSHS divisions, Washington Courts, Division of Developmental Disabilities; local CASA/GAL program; and tribal child welfare services.

Complaints against the Children's Administration by DSHS region



DSHS Regions

| | Children and Family Services | Licensed Resources |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Region 1 Totals | 67 | 1 |
| Clarkston* | 3 | |
| Colfax | | |
| Colville | 8 | |
| Moses Lake | 10 | |
| Newport | 1 | |
| Omak | 2 | |
| Regional Office Spokane | 36 | |
| Wenatchee | 5 | |
| Republic | 2 | |
| Region 2 Totals | 50 | 0 |
| Clarkston* | 1 | |
| Ellensburg | 1 | |
| Regional Office-Yakima | 3 | |
| Richland/Tri-Cities | 11 | |
| Sunnyside | | |
| Toppenish | 5 | |
| Walla Walla | 8 | |
| Yakima | 20 | |
| White Salmon** | | |
| Goldendale** | 1 | |
| Region 3 Totals | 81 | 0 |
| Alderwood/Lynnwood | 9 | |
| Arlington/Smokey Point | 11 | |
| Bellingham | 6 | |
| Everett | 23 | |
| Friday Harbor | 1 | |
| Monroe/Sky Valley | 6 | |
| Mount Vernon | 8 | |
| Oak Harbor | 8 | |
| Regional Office-Everett | 9 | |

*Moved from Region 2 to Region 1 effective July 1, 2003

Source: The Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

| | Children and Family Services | Licensed Resources |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Region 4 Totals | 81 | 1 |
| Bellevue/King Eastside | 21 | |
| Kent/King South | 29 | |
| Regional Office-Seattle | 3 | 1 |
| Seattle Central (include NA unit) | 2 | |
| Seattle North | 3 | |
| Seattle South | 9 | |
| African-American Children's Services | 4 | |
| King West | 18 | |
| Region 5 Totals | 74 | 0 |
| Bremerton/Kitsap | 21 | |
| Regional Office-Tacoma | 53 | |
| Region 6 Totals | 60 | 0 |
| Aberdeen | 8 | |
| Centralia | 6 | |
| Kelso | 6 | |
| Port Angeles | 2 | |
| Port Townsend | 2 | |
| Regional Office-Lacey/Olympia | 4 | |
| Shelton | 7 | |
| South Bend | 1 | |
| Stevenson | 2 | |
| Tumwater | 2 | |
| Vancouver | 18 | |
| Forks | 1 | |
| Long Beach | 1 | |
| STATEWIDE | | |
| Central Intake Unit | 6 | |
| Children's Administration HQ, Olympia | | |

**Moved from Region 6 to Region 2 effective July 1, 2004

Most Frequently Identified Complaint Issues:

From September 1, 2002 to August 31, 2003 (*Many complaints identified more than one issue*)

Child Safety _____ 220 complaints

- ✓ Failure to protect child from parental abuse or neglect
 - Neglect/Lack of Supervision
 - Physical abuse
 - Sexual abuse
 - Emotional abuse
 - Developmentally disabled child in need of protection
 - Children with no parent willing or capable of providing care
 - Other abuse
- ✓ Failure to address safety concerns involving child in foster care or other substitute care
- ✓ Failure to address safety concerns involving child being returned to parental care
- ✓ Failure to provide appropriate placement or services to children at risk of harming themselves or others

Family Separation and Reunification _____ 210 complaints

- ✓ Failure to reunite family
- ✓ Failure to place child with relative (including siblings)
- ✓ Unnecessary removal of child from parental care
- ✓ Failure to provide appropriate contact between child and family
- ✓ Other inappropriate placement of child
- ✓ Inappropriate removal of child from relative placement
- ✓ Inappropriate termination of parental rights
- ✓ Concerns regarding voluntary placement agreements for non-dependent children
- ✓ Other family separation concerns

Dependent Child Health, Well-Being, Permanency ___ 84 complaints

- ✓ Inappropriate change of child's foster or other placement/inadequate transition to new placement
- ✓ Failure to provide child with appropriate medical, mental health, educational or other services, or inadequate service plan
- ✓ Inappropriate permanency plan or unreasonable delay in achieving permanency
- ✓ Failure to provide appropriate adoption support services/other adoption issues
- ✓ Inappropriate placement/inadequate services to children in institutions/facilities

Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004

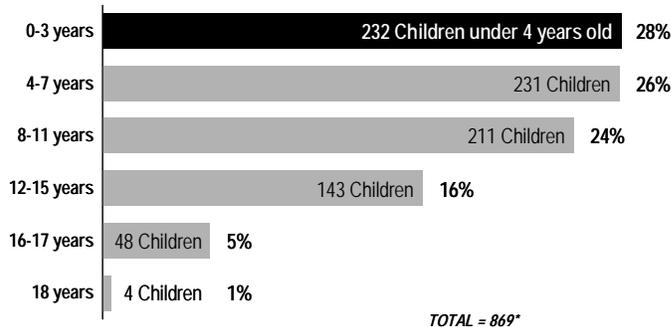
Complaint Issues

As in previous years, **safety of children** was the issue most frequently identified in complaints to the Ombudsman. Complainants were concerned with the allegedly inadequate response by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to the reported maltreatment of children living in their parents' care, as well as children living in foster care or in other substitute care. Concerns about **family separation and reunification** and the **health, well-being and permanency** of children under state supervision were also frequently identified issues in complaints to the office.

Most of the children identified in complaints to the Ombudsman were age seven or younger.

The table at left shows the breakdown of complaints received in the three most frequently identified complaint categories.

Ages of children identified in complaints



*Some individual children were counted more than once because they were identified in more than one complaint.

Source: The Family and Children's Ombudsman, August 2004